

Administrator's Update for 7/20/11

By Ray Sandrock, County Administrator

On July 12, 2011 Charlotte County officials presented the tentative Fiscal Year 11/12 budget to the Board of County Commissioners. The most critical decision or outcome from the meeting was the Board setting tentative millage rates. Any millage rate set at this point in the process can be lowered but not raised. My recommendation to the Board was to set rates that would produce the same level of revenue as this current year—this is referred to as rollback rates. The reason for my recommendation was to give the Commission and the community maximum flexibility as we continue through the budget process, which concludes with two public hearings, Sept. 15 and Sept. 29. Since 2008, property values have declined 42.2 percent and property taxes have been reduced by 85.7 million dollars. Charlotte County Government has worked to align the programs and services to match these declining revenues. I am concerned that further cuts to services and programs would negatively impact our community. Again, by setting the millage rates to produce the same amount of revenue as the current year gives us the flexibility to consider all options prior to making the final decision on Sept. 29. The budget process began in January with public hearings to receive input from Charlotte County citizens. Thank you to Charlotte County citizens and employees as we navigate through these difficult economic times.

Water rescue practice

On June 21 the Charlotte County Fire/EMS department and the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office conducted a joint training session on water rescue skills. Fire/EMS Marine Operations and the Sheriff's office dive team started the morning at the South County Regional Park pool in Punta Gorda. Basic rescue swimmer concepts were covered such as victim profiling, approaches, body contact swims and equipment familiarization. In the afternoon crews met at Laishley Park where the training went air borne with the utilization of the Sheriff's Office helicopter. After a quick safety brief and aircraft familiarization, crews began the water session by deploying rescue rafts from the helicopter. Rescue boats and rescue swimmers then came in to assist and complete the rescue. The second part of the session consisted of deploying rescue swimmers from the helicopter, two at a time, over the water. Once the swimmers were in the water, the skill sets from the morning session were used to facilitate the staged rescues.

Senior meals

Our Charlotte County human services department staff attended the grand opening of the new senior meal site dining facility at the Cooper Street Recreation Center. Operations of the meal site is provided by the Senior Friendships Center, Inc. with federal grant funds from the Older American's Act provided through the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and the Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida. Our Charlotte County senior services division staff assists with outreach and referrals and our transit division provides rides to some of the senior meal sites in the county.

Fall journalists trip

Visit Florida, the state's official source for travel planning, has awarded a Cultural Heritage and Nature Tourism Marketing Grant in the amount of \$2,500 to our Charlotte Harbor Visitor and Convention Bureau. The matching grant will be used to host journalists on a fall media research trip, highlighting Charlotte County's nature-based tourism opportunities. Editorial coverage is one of the most cost-efficient and effective ways to reach potential visitors and this grant will help better position and market Charlotte County as a desirable vacation destination.